

Assistance to Preserve Flood Damaged Materials

My books/photographs/important documents got wet, but aren't muddy. How do I dry them out?

It's of the utmost importance to deal with wet items as quickly as possible so that they don't become moldy. You can place books, most photographs and photographic negatives (excluding glass plate negatives and rolled negatives...), and documents into a regular freezer as an interim measure to avoid the onset of mold until they can be dried completely and properly.

Photographs should be removed from frames if they have not become stuck to the glass. Books, papers and home-printed digital photographs can be safely dried in a place where air is circulating (i.e. not in a tightly closed room). Place plain paper towels in between sections of 15 pages or less and change out with dry paper towels as they become saturated. To dry photographs that have been professionally developed, place wax paper in between each photograph as they are drying, or lay the photographs out individually. Be aware that photographs may curl if dried in this manner, but can be flattened later. Smaller books can be stood on end on a flat surface with the pages fanned open to air dry. Only use this method if the book is strong enough to stand open in this manner. Books and magazines with clay-coated (glossy) paper must be opened so that every page remains separated while drying to avoid the pages becoming stuck together.

Syracuse University Library has diagrams online that show many of these procedures.
<http://library.syr.edu/information/preservation/manual.htm#recover>

Keep in mind that if you have a damaged picture, especially if it has adhered to the glass in its frame, it may be possible to scan it through the glass and reprint it successfully.

{blotting may cause loss of ink if running}expand---

My book/photograph/important document is moldy. What do I do with it?

It is best not to come in contact with the mold as it is an allergen and a health hazard. Wear gloves and a protective mask. Freezing the item will prohibit the growth of mold but not kill it. Freezing will buy a person time until the item can be dealt with properly. Wrap it in plastic to keep mold spores from traveling to other things.

A professional conservator can evaluate the mold but understand that while the appearance of mold can be reduced, it will never be completely eradicated and, given the right conditions of humidity and moisture, will become active again. To reiterate, mold cannot be removed completely and most of the damage cannot be reversed nor can the original appearance of the document be restored.

Get the moldy item to an environment that is cooler and/or drier. When determining whether to keep the item, consideration must be made as to the potential toxicity of exposure to mold.

The pages of my book, etc. stuck together after they got wet. Can I separate them now that they are dry?

If your book or magazine has pages that have dried in a block, it is likely that they won't be able to be separated, especially if the paper was a clay-coated 'glossy' style paper (often found in magazines and coffee-table books).

If your photographs or negatives have dried and adhered together, it is probable that the photographic emulsions have bonded to each other. A trained photograph conservator may be able to reverse this damage. Call the American Institute for Conservation 202/452-9545.

My photo/paper tore after it got wet. Can I tape it back together?

It's not a good idea if the item is antique or if it has historic, sentimental or monetary value because over time the adhesive of all pressure sensitive tapes, even those marketed as archival or 'acid-free', will leach into the paper and damage it permanently. Consult a conservation professional who can properly repair the item. One way to find conservation professionals is to contact the American Institute for Conservation at (202) 452-9545. Until a conservator can treat the item a book can be safely tied together with cotton tape and books and papers can be placed in high quality plastic sleeves (Mylar™ and Melinex™ are examples of archival quality plastic). If the item has no intrinsic/permanent value, then it should be dried completely before using tape of any kind to repair it.

My book/photograph/important document got muddy. Can I wipe the mud off?

If the item is wet it should be rinsed gently in clear water first. Paper is fragile when wet should be supported. Blotting or brushing debris off is the preferable method. Attempts at removal should be executed with great care.

If the mud/dirt has dried on the item it is OK to gently brush it off but be aware that staining may have already occurred.

For additional Assistance

You can also reach the Indiana State Archives conservation Lab at arc@icpr.in.gov or at (317) 591-5220 x 376.